

Frequently Asked Questions about Jane Brown Playshops

1. How should I prepare my child-- what should I say to him/her about attending a Playshop?

Please share with your child that you will be attending an adoptive family support group event and that there will be a special group for just the children, with moms and dads doing something different in a separate room. Tell your child that this will be a fun group in which they will be playing, but also learning and sharing about being adopted. Let them know if a friend or two will be in the group with them. The more matter-of-fact, upbeat, and direct you are, the better.

2. What should I do if my child says that she/he doesn't want to go?

I would be firm, but upbeat that this is something that is important and special that you don't want them to miss out on. You can say that they will not have to talk or participate if they don't want to, but that you want them to go check it out before they decide. You can tell them that lots of kids say the same thing, but then decide that it was a really terrific group and that they are really glad their parent(s) took them.

3. Are you (Jane Brown) going to bring up the term "abandoned" with my child?

We are going to examine the adoption process, but we will not be delving into this as a topic of discussion. Playshops are designed to be a gentle, introduction to exploring growing up adopted and this is not an area that young children are ready to discuss in a group setting without their parents.

4. What would happen if another child used that term or brings up things that my child hasn't yet heard about her story?

By the age of five, I would encourage parents to have shared what they know of the pre-adoption story with their child, if they want to get there first! Otherwise, it is quite likely that someone else will introduce pieces of the story and not necessarily in a gentle, accurate, supportive way that portrays adoption as a first-best way to become part of a family. What we will play and discuss in Playshops should not be beyond what children have already heard from you and are ready to process in a fairly simplistic way. Should another child raise the topic of abandonment, I will need to provide accurate information as parents would, of course, do, but then I would change the focus of where the group is headed, since I believe that it is parents' prerogative to get into this area when and as they wish to.

5. What type of activities will you be doing?

Children learn through their senses and individual children do not take in, process, or integrate information or ideas in the same way or at the same rate. Therefore, we will use drama, drawing, making crafts, active games, exploring objects, puppetry, and discussions during Playshops. All will be designed to teach children about adoption, help them to share what they think with each other, bring some of their feelings to the surface, and know that it is a good idea to continue to ask questions and talk to their parents. We will also explore racial identity and diversity. We're going to look at teasing and what children can do about it, without naming this teasing as race prejudice, although some of the children may share that they have been asked "too many questions" or have heard a negative comment because of the way that they look.

6. What if my child cries?

Parents are going to be in the room for a portion of the first activity in order to help their child get comfortable in the group. I will ask parents to leave and ask the children to wave goodbye and blow them a kiss. If your child cries and is uncomfortable having you leave, I will ask that you stay and sit quietly with your child. As soon as your child is more

comfortable, I will quietly excuse you. If your child is resistant and not ready, again I'll suggest that you stay for a little while more. Most of the time, children DO eventually allow their parent to leave the room.

Should your child start to cry during the session (unlikely, but it does happen to the little ones), someone will come to fetch you and bring you into the room. I will ask you to sit quietly and watch for when your child is feeling comfortable again before I suggest that you leave.

7. If there is something special about my child that I think Jane should know, what should I do?

Jane is very happy to have parents call to chat in that they might decide whether Playshops is right for their child or to talk over any sensitive issue or concern. Her phone number is: (602) 690-5338 and you would be calling Arizona. Parents can also write to Jane at e-mail janebrown77@earthlink.net

8. My child has a special friend who is older/younger. Is it OK if I ask for an exception to be made so that they can be in the same group?

The activities and how they are specifically facilitated are designed to be age-appropriate activities presented to the various age levels of the children in specific groups. Therefore, it would be very difficult for all involved and not helpful to the children to make these types of exceptions. One of the things that you might do, instead, is to plan some time after the Playshop sessions for the children to socialize together and share with one another what their group did. This will help children process the work and to strengthen their friendships.

9. I am feeling very anxious. Is this normal?

It is not only normal, it is healthy and appropriate for parents to feel anxious about having someone they do not know or only know through articles they've read work with their child around sensitive topics. Anticipating the discussions or issues that are likely to be discussed or played out brings our feelings, questions, and worries right to the surface. It can cause us to wonder whether we are handling this part of our parenting effectively or whether we measure up to others' standards. It can increase our desire to protect our children from what is sure to be confusing or painful and also bring us face to face with the reality of the fact that we can't. It is an act of faith for parents to take this BIG step and allow their child to participate in Playshops, knowing that they will not be able to listen in and intervene. If parents can remember that this is JUST the situation their child will be plunged into when he/she goes off to school and that he/she needs and deserves some preparation for this in a setting that is controllable and will be sensitive and supportive, then it can be a little easier to let go and send your child with your blessings.

10. We have a very different type of family. Will the language be inclusive or might my child come away feeling even more different in a group of her adopted peers?

The adoption community is very diverse-- thank goodness! Children need and deserve to know that they and their parent(s) will be welcomed and respected when they attend an adoptive family event. This is particularly true when a child is alone in a group where questions or comments can come up about adoptive parents and families. Jane is especially sensitive to this issue and will do everything in her power to make sure that children know that their families are honored and respected. Inclusive language is a given!

11. What will be the role of the adult adoptees?

The adult adoptees will have a very important, but limited roll to play. Jane will be facilitating the activities. The adult adoptees will be playing with the children, sharing glimpses of their childhood experiences (as Jane asks them to), telling the children about their current lives to provide some modeling as to what the Future could be like (i.e. "Yes, I

do have a boyfriend. I go to school too. I have a job and friends. I am STILL adopted..."). The children almost always LOVE them and you might expect to find your child giving away hugs and smiles, running their hands through the hair of one of our adoptees, and talking about her long after the event has ended. These are very special VIP's in the lives of these children.